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ABSTRACT

The nature of changes in students and institutions since the 1950s and ecological responses to keep the student governance system current with institutional and student needs are discussed. Brigham Young University's approach is used as an example. Ecological models suggest that, even in systems where there are relative differences in power between agents, institutional activities and those of various participants will have a systematic interactive impact. Brigham Young University adopted a seven-step process to implement environmental change: (1) designers, in conjunction with community members, select values; (2) values are then translated into specific goals; (3) environments are designed that contain mechanisms to reach the goals; (4) environments are fitted to participants; (5) participant perceptions of the environment are measured; (6) participant behavior resulting from environmental perceptions is monitored; and (7) data on outcomes, as indicated by participant perceptions and behavior, is fed back to designers. It is important that values underlying the redesign of the student government be congruent with values of the university. Core values identified and functions that support the values are considered, along with structural possibilities that will maximize the value system and functions. (SW)

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by

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ECOLOGICAL RESPONSES TO CHANGING
NEEDS OF STUDENT GOVERNMENT

The past thirty years have witnessed dramatic changes in the "typical" college and the "typical" college student. Those of us who work with student governments have seen these changes reflected in changed approaches by both students and administration in the structure and function of student governments. This paper will first describe generally the nature of the changes in students and institutions over the last three decades, and then propose an approach to keeping the structure of student governance systems current with institutional and student needs. The final section will describe our attempts at Brigham Young University to implement developmental changes in our system.

The end of World War II had an immense impact on higher learning due to the inundation of GI Bill recipients on campuses all over the nation. As David D. Henry in his Challenges Past, Challenges Present (1975) points out, never before had there been such rapid growth in the history of higher education. Requirements of aptitude and preparation among freshmen were dropped to allow all veterans the opportunity of a college education. Goals, programs, and curriculums were altered. New services in counseling, career placement, and campus activities were created (Henry, p. 55). Physically, campuses also underwent changes as buildings were quickly erected and professors hired to meet the growing demand.

Unfortunately, by the early fifties most of the World War II veterans had graduated and the enrollments were thus declining. The number of veterans enrolled in universities and colleges had dropped from 1,122,738 in 1947 to 388,747 in 1951 (Henry, p. 87). Schools were forced to find other young people to fill the slots by recruiting college students. Unfortunately, many of those recruited were not prepared for the rigors of college study and learning. The response to this problem, according to Russell Kirk in his Decadence and Renewal in the Higher Learning (1978) was that, "the college would mend its ways and alter its curricula and reduce its standards to suit the tastes of the recruits" (p. 4). Kirk laments that "even the better universities and colleges were forced into this degrading search for warm young bodies, whatever the quality of the minds in those bodies" (p. 4).

In retrospect, a more prudent and beneficial reaction to the waning of enrollments might have been an entrenchment period wherein values of the higher education might have been reexamined and reaffirmed. This time might have been used to strengthen the curriculum and the professors, a time to give quality a chance to

catch up . . . indeed, a time to reflect. Some educators did "advocate greater selectivity in admissions as a means for restricting growth," but theirs were voices in the wilderness (Henry, p. 103, citing American Council on Education, p.2).

Therefore, in the fall of 1955 approximately two million, eight hundred and thirty-nine thousand students enrolled at universities colleges, and "higher" schools of one sort or another -- an increase of more than a hundred thousand over the preceding year's enrollment. This was about one-third of the total number of people in the United States between the ages of eighteen and twenty-one" (Kirk, p. 21). Thus the creation of Behemoth U--to quote Kirk--and its goal to educate the masses. John Gardner, then President of the Carnegie Corporation, in 1955 protested against the practice of "sending great numbers of our youth on to college each year without any clear notion as to what they will get out of it, but simply in pursuance of a vague notion that "college is an opportunity that should not be denied them". He concluded that "this makes no sense at all" (as cited in Henry, p. 112). This trend caused the dean of Columbia University Law School to describe the graduates of our liberal arts colleges in 1955 as "ignorant not merely of classical literature, but of American history, government, political economy; they could not read swiftly or comprehendingly; many of them did not even know how to use a dictionary" (Kirk, p. 24).

This period of time was also characterized by relative passivity on the part of students with respect to institutional authority and direction. Students accepted, with little concern direction from their schools on where to live, what courses to take, and how to conduct their personal lives. It was the age of the "David Nelson" fraternities, which reacted to institutional direction with mild prankish responses, but largely adhered to curfews, dress and grooming standards and a myriad of other institutional expectations.

In the latter half of the 1950's all eyes were turned to and fingers pointed at areas of higher learning when Soviet Russia successfully orbited a manned satellite. The answer provided was the National Defense Education Act of 1958. Great amounts of money were made available to expand physically, and universities were encouraged to adapt their programs of study to "defense" needs, thus favoring applied science and technology at the expense of humane and social studies (Kirk, p. 44). Another long-run consequence of this answer was the close linkage of universities with the famous "military-industrial complex." As is pointed out by Kirk, "in time this would become the cause of one of the most frenzied denunciations of the American universities by radical students" (Kirk, p. 45).

In 1958, however, undergraduate "activists" had not yet appeared on the scene. The 1958 student is described by Kirk as:

> An indolent mob of students...(who) came from the Eisenhower suburbs,' prosperous, smug, unaccustomed to work or discipline. What might be done with one's children in their late 'teens'? Few of them had been brought up in any skill or with any bent toward accomplishment; the great majority of them had been poorly, if expensively, schooled in the permissive schools of these new suburbs; they lacked norms or aims. What could be done with them before they reached the magical age of twenty-one and were cast to the world, the flesh, and the devil? Send them to-college! (p. 45).

As the 1960's began vocationalism was on the rise in higher education. The social adjustment of college students was also held out by colleges and universities as a raison d'etre. Classes such as ballroom dancing and salesmanship and even a course in surfboard riding at the University of Hawaii found their way into class catalogues. Classes that caused painful intellectual development seemed to be on a downward trend. There were many students who simply saw the university as a job-certification center and a matrimonial bureau.

Another factor in the tremendous growth of colleges and universities, especially state and community, was the apparent deep conviction among many Americans that the Declaration of Independence guaranteed "life, liberty, and the pursuit of a college education." Again there was the push to lower standards to allow more young Americans the opportunity of a college education. Once students were admitted it became almost unAmerican to allow them to fail, and thus professors were urged to grade with sensitivity. Grade inflation resulted.

Rather than be surprised at the violence that broke out in the late 60's, one should have been more surprised if it had not. The groundwork appeared to be carefully laid. It was the era of "Do your own thing" and that is what students did. The liberal democratic age after World War II was soft and permissive. The universities had become soft and permissive. Their response to the idealistic, altruistic bent of the 60's student was to create a more liberal atmosphere in academic structure, in evaluating practices and in social activities. The epitome of this permissiveness was to actually create entire colleges, such as Santa Cruz, based on permissiveness.

Students during this era were not only socially conscious, but interested in spreading their altruism, if necessary, through violent means. Students demanded, and received positions on institutional governing boards, and reacted to all forms of institutional intrusion on their life-style. They, like Brech, wished to "prepare the world for kindness," but, Brech-like they concluded in doing so they "could not (themselves) be kind."

One of the perplexing facts concerning the college riots and demonstrations is that, according to Gallup International, 1969, only 28 percent of college students had participated in a demonstration of any type while in college and during the week of the most widespread campus unrest in the history following the Kent and Jackson State shooting, while 43 percent of the nation's colleges and universities were uneffected by campus unrest.-(Peterson and Bilorusky, 1971, p. 15). Kirk asserts that "the activists did not exceed more than five percent of any student body, even on the more systematically radicalized campuses" (p. 82). Where were the other 75% - 90%? Why didn't they come to the rescue? Kirk suggests that students who had been "shallowly and permissively schooled and reared, with no strong interests of any sort, sometimes with too much money and too little occupation, bored and lacking in strength of will, egoistic without real self-confidence...were indifferent. They had no real love for their college or university; they were on the campus only because going to college had become the conventional thing to do, or because they had to go through the unpleasant process of job-certification. Nobody had told them that the ends of the higher learning are wisdom and virtue...Who will adventure much for an educational establishment that seems like a factory? 'Factory windows are always broken'....The students had been instructed, moreover, that there are no 'absolutes'--meaning that there are no truths, no standards, nothing is worth fighting for" (Kirk, 1982-84).

The Vietnam War, the Civil Rights Activism and the disillusionment of Watergate all changed the students' trust for institutions and their responses to social needs. Although the sixties had given students greater control over their college experience, students found in the seventies that controlling institutions had not created the expected nirvana. Institutions, though not worthy of trust, seemed, nonetheless, to be difficult to change, and that recognition, coupled with the financial crises of the seventies brought many to seek more individual rather than institutional answers to the dilemmas presented by higher education. Students moved into the eighties perceiving that institutions were to be used for personal reasons, and that the primary concerns of higher education ought to be that of maximizing future individual success.

"For a majority of today's freshmen, the objective of a college education is to get a better job and make more money," according to a survey conducted by Alexander W. Astin. This trend toward materialism was reported in the American Freshman: National Norms for Fall 1984, conducted by the Cooperative Institutional Research Program of the University of California at Los Angeles and the American Council on Education.

The survey, which has been conducted each fall for the past 19 years, showed that 67.8 percent said that a "very important"

reason for attending college was to be able to make more money. Even more revealing was the students answer to the question "what objectives do you consider to be important? 73 percent said that becoming an authority in his or her field was very important and 71.2 percent said they hoped to be "well off financially". Under the same category less than 45 percent said it was important to "develop a philosophy of life."

Astin after questioning 182,370 students on 345 campuses, on areas including career choice, reasons for attending college, and probable major fields of study, suggested that "several of the survey's findings...reflected the increasing materialism of students."
In that sense he found them "no different from the rest of the public". He noted that polls from last year's Presidential election that asked why voters had chosen a particular candidate revealed that they had based their choices on "pocketbook" issues.

Arthur Levine in When Dreams and Heros Died (1980) points out that this trend towards more conservative views, at least when it comes to choosing career goals, began in the later 70's and has had its effect on the social life of today's college student. He contends that the concern for the material joys of life has been translated by students into a greater concern for the "professional" fields. Accounting, business, law, optometry, pharmacy and other professions not in the nether world of the job market are growing. The 1984 ACE/UCLA freshman study bears out this trend.

Before we see the 1984 freshman as totally materialistic, it is important to note that the study also found that 69.8 percent still reported that they had performed some type of volunteer work, and 69.9 percent felt it was important to help others who are in difficulty. They also have attended concerts (73.2 percent), done extra reading (67.6 percent), and believe the government isn't doing enough about pollution (77.7 percent). But back to their concerns for getting ahead, they feel they should have more say in evaluating faculty (70 percent) and 90.4 percent feel that there should be a minimum competency requirement for college graduation.

As to the effect of this growing trend on campus social life, Levine also suggests that there is a growing tendency to seek activities that are not associated with the campus. The 1984 study cited here suggests that although freshman students are still looking for social interaction their time for campus activities will be limited.

Levine says that undergraduates in general are finding on-campus activities less and less relevant. One reason he suggests for this down trend is that more students following

their Freshman experience are moving off-campus. In 1969, for example, only about half of the undergraduates lived off-campus while in 1976 seven out of ten had moved out of the dorms. These commuting students, according to Levine, have taken on the attitude that anything not required is not done, and social life on campus is not required. A Carnegie Survey in 1976 showed that 54 percent of all college students worked at least part-time. This time spent on the job is time that will not be devoted to social activities on or off campus.

Levine mentions a final contributing factor when student leaders were asked to name the major issues of concern to undergraduates in a 1978 survey (National On Campus Report) they placed parking and security at the top of the list. Since most students now live off campus, it is not surprising that parking their cars is a major issue. Security concerns may well reflect their turn to protecting what is theirs from the world around them.

The trend that seems to have begun in the late 70's and continues in the 80's towards getting ahead, finding a better job and away from social issues appears to be reflected in a survey conducted earlier this year through our offices at Brigham Young University. Of 33 schools responding ranging in size from over 40,000 to as few as 900, the average participation in student government, including elected, volunteer workers was about 100 students. This seems to reflect the attitude that there are other things to do with the time available than being involved with current on-campus activities, particularly in activities which do not necessarily further self-interest.

As we have struggled to find ways of meaningfully accomodating the purposes and structure of student government to the changing needs of both students and the institution we have been attracted to an ecological approach to change which deals with all environmental influences which bear on change.

Ecology is a term commonly used in biology, but can be used to describe any set of interrelationships between organisms and an environment. One of the important interrelationships which has been observed is that any intervention in an ecosystem or environment will have interactive impacts on the rest of the system. Quite often the impact that a planned intervention has on the environment is markedly different from the results anticipated, and frequently is more profound than that which was predicted. Psychological ecology has adopted this concept and has used it to describe the interactions between individuals and their environments. This has included analyses of physical work environments, socio-psychological environments and learning environments. The relationships observed in these environmental studies have been depicted by the following equation: $B=f(P+E)$, where B is behavior, P is the person and E is environment.

(Lewin, 1936). This means that behavior equals the function of the interaction of the person and the environment. Any physical or social environment will have an impact on the behavior of the individuals who interact with it. The converse is equally true: the behavior of individuals within an environment will have an effect on the nature of that environment. Consequently, any change in either the environment or the person will impact the entire system.

A number of ecological change or planning models have been developed premised on effectuating change through manipulations of the environment or individual behavior. We were drawn to the ecological models as ways of planning and implementing change, in large part, because we felt that they suggested a viable relationship between the elements of the university ecosystem. Changes in university systems are often depicted in straight line, power based organizational flow charts, which indicate that all change is a result of administrative fiat. In contrast, the ecological models suggest that, even in systems where there are relative differences in power between agents, any act by any agent will be reflected in a systematic interactive impact. Such models are capable of dealing with the subtleties which exist in an academic system in which there are differences in interests, power and influence between individuals within the campus ecosystem including faculty, staff, students, and alumni and the local community.

Ecological models recognize differences, but also suggest that all of the members of the ecosystem are impacted by institutional activities, and by the activities of others within the system. While ecological change models can provide conceptual advantages in accurately describing relationships between members of complex systems, they are also plagued with pragmatic difficulties, since the assessment of the amount of impact any environmental intervention will or should have on the ecosystem is difficult to determine.

Despite the pragmatic difficulties with the ecological models, we were persuaded that they offer a useful outline for the process of change. The model which we adopted is the ecosystem model which was first articulated in WICHE in 1973. The model impressed us since it is both explicitly value-based and implicitly developmental. It is a seven-step sequential process designed to implement environmental change. The steps have been identified as:

1. Designers, in conjunction with community members, select values.
2. Values are then translated into specific goals.
3. Environments are designed which contain mechanisms to reach the stated goals.

4. Environments are fitted to the participants in the environment.
5. Participant perceptions of the environment are measured.
6. Participant behavior resulting from environmental perceptions is monitored.
7. Data on the environmental designs (sic) success and failures, as indicated by the participant perception and behavior, is fed back to the designers in order that they may continue to learn about person/environment fit and design better environments. (Banning and Kaiser, 1974).

The model is premised on certain value-laden assumptions which we felt were appropriate reflections of some of our professional values with respect to the individuals within our academic ecosystem. These assumptions include:

1. "Those affected by an environment have the moral right to participate in its design and redesign." (Kaiser, 1978)
2. "Systems should emanate from values." (Kaiser and Banning, 1974)
3. "The campus environment consists of all stimuli which impinge upon the students' sensory modalities." (WICHE, 1973)
4. "A transactional relationship exists between college students and their campus environment, i.e., the students shape the environment and are shaped by it." (WICHE, 1973)

As a "way of acting" the ecosystem model provides an outline for moral and theoretical intervention in the campus ecosystem. All of the members of the system have the opportunity, either directly or through representatives, to be involved in the change process from the initial step of value setting. As a result, there is a focus on the collective reasons for existence which promotes greater acceptance of the goals and other elements of the change process. We have found that the value identification stage is a process which is, in many ways, as significant as the outcome. The sharing of values has fostered greater understanding between otherwise competing groups, of shared missions and objectives. It has also allowed most problems to be dealt with as theoretical rather than personal issues. This has avoided many of the difficult territorial and other personal conflicts which often impair decision-making processes.

In response to the changed needs of the new "conservative" student of the 1980's, and in hopes of creating a system which we felt could have stronger educational underpinnings, we attempted to employ the ecosystem process to change our student government system.

The project is not complete and we have made a few mistakes, but have learned much through the process so far. We wish to examine three major concepts that we have learned that may be helpful at other institutions.

We began with a strong value of counteracting some of the non-humanistic characteristics with which our students came to our institution, with activities and programs which would help them become more sensitive to the needs and concerns of others.

An example of the highly individualistic approach of our students was the fact that at first many of the officers had a difficult time in seeing any problems with the extant student government system. Most of them felt that their own goals were being met by the system, even though few other students were involved. On the other hand, the University was anxious to involve as many students as possible in developmental extra-curricular experiences that would broaden their understanding of others. We felt that it was important to state clearly our position and made an announcement that the present student government system would move towards a system more integrated with university values and more facilitative of broad student involvement.

At this point it became our responsibility as advisors to evaluate the interaction between the environment (the University) and the student officers so as to ensure the development of the individuals and the institution would be enhanced and not impeded. For each officer we had to assess that amount of challenge they were feeling with the proposed changes and give proper amount of support when necessary so that their development would be enhanced and that they wouldn't retreat into an adversarial role against the institution.

We have also learned that along with helping the students to understand the need for changes it's extremely important that they have the opportunity to take part in the redesigning of that new system. As Endler and Magleson (1977) cited by Delwarte have stated, "Behavior is determined by a continuous process of interaction between the individual and the situation he encounters (feedback). The individual is an intentional active agent of this interaction process." p. 12. As more and more of the officers began to realize that change was going to take place, their biggest fear seemed to be the loss of their identity. This fits with their developmental psychosocial stage of identity as Erickson (1964) has pointed out, "The key problem of identity is the capacity of the ego to sustain sameness and continuity in the face of changing fate."

These young people wanted to make sure that they had something that they could put their names on when their year was up. As we became involved in the process it was evident that we

would not have a new system by the time their year was finished. It was extremely difficult for them to accept the fact that for all the time and effort that they had put into the project they would receive no credit. This was quite a developmental challenge for some and it was extremely hard for us to give them the support they needed to outweigh the pressure of the challenge. Most of them retreated into working harder on their programming efforts for the year.

Other involved students recognized, however, that it was important that the values underlying the redesign of the student government subenvironment were congruent with the values of the larger environment (the University). Those students joined with faculty and staff in identifying a core of values which were consistent with institutional values and supportive of the potentials of student government. The values this group identified included:

Service: We value an understanding of others and a willingness to help others, even at personal cost.

Competence: We value the development of a wide range of skills and abilities to facilitate the effective accomplishment of appropriate individual and institutional goals.
Representation: We value the opportunity for students to impact their educational experience through communication of student needs and perspectives, and through appropriate involvement in decision-making processes.
Development: We value the psychosocial, spiritual and cognitive development of students.
Participation: We believe that students should be active participants in their university education through appropriate involvement in developing values, goals, plans, implementation, and feedback about the educational process.
Involvement: We value the importance of students' involvement in all aspects of their education in the University.

After these values were identified, possible student government functions were evaluated to determine which functions would support the values. These functions included:

Academic Programming
Social Programming
Cultural Programming
Service Programming
Minority Services
Women's Concerns
Re-entry Student Services
Ombudsman Services
Student Advocacy

Student Representation
University Committee Service
Student Involvement
Student Participation in the Operation of the Student Center
Married Student Services

These functions, in turn, lead to identification of structural possibilities which would maximize the value system and functions. One of the possible structures was described as follows:

A three branch government be designed to support the values and functions previously identified:

1. The first branch would be a legislative branch consisting of elected student representatives from each college. The elections would occur each fall under the direction of the Studentbody President who would be elected the preceding March and would preside over the senate. The senate would be charged with student representation to the University, reviewing the budget of the service branch, and student service on University Committees. Members serving in the legislative branch would be expected to give between two and four hours of service weekly and would not be compensated.

2. The second branch would be a service branch which would consist of an elected presiding officer, and the following officers to be appointed based on competency by the presiding officer of the service branch and the Studentbody President:
   Ombudsman
   Women's Concerns
   Attorney General
   Minority Concerns
   Re-entry Student Services
   Married Student Services
   In addition to the officers listed above, there would be an officer responsible for student clubs and organizations who would be selected by the organizations for which he/she is responsible. These students would serve approximately twenty hours a week and would be paid on a timecard at normal student wages.

3. The third branch would be the programming and student center branch. It would consist of a board for the student center and a programming board selected by the student center board. The student center board would be a self-perpetuating board with student and faculty-/staff membership. The student center board would have as standing members the Studentbody President and the presiding officer of the service branch. All members

of the student center board would be uncompensated for their board service. The board would report through the Dean of Student Life. The precise composition of this board will be recommended after additional review. The programming board would report to the student center board and would consist of competency-selected student employees responsible for the following programming areas:

Academic Programming
Social Programming
Athletic Programming
Service Programming
Cultural Programming

In addition to the programming functions listed above, there would be a programming board member charged with the responsibility for student involvement, to ensure opportunities for all interested students to participate in student programming.

As the structure for student government began to enlarge, we also identified values that we felt would support the new system. Our values included:

- We value students as individuals and as a group for what they are and for what they may become.
- We value an environment where individuals will have experiences that foster a mutual trust which considers motivations and developmental levels of individuals.
- We value an atmosphere of open, multi-directional communication that promotes a continuing dialogue in the spirit of mutual respect aimed at shared understanding.
- We value stewardship that acknowledges that a balance must exist between freedom of choice and the delegation of responsibility with its inherent accountability.

These advisor values, coupled with the values, functions and structures of student government, have provided a base for implementing and supporting the new structure. To be true to the ecosystem model, we plan to reevaluate on a continual basis, the outcomes of the new system, and to re-assess the values and the subsequent design stages of the ecosystem in order to ensure that our system of student government continues to respond in meaningful ways to the continual changes in the ecosystem of which it is a part.

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